

T.E.A.C.H.

Can Sunday School Function as a Small Group Ministry?

Pastor Dan Harrison

We live in a world today that is constantly changing but there are a few things that don't change. One of those things is small groups. Small groups have been around for a very, very long time now.

You might find it interesting that small groups are not an American invention. John Wesley and the Methodists in England used them to great advantage long before they became popular in America. But the history of small groups goes much farther back than John Wesley.

The New Testament speaks often of believers gathering in small groups to do life together. In fact the small group experiences of Jesus and the disciples fill a good many pages of the New Testament.

But the rich heritage of small groups can be traced even farther back. The Old Testament seems to teach that Adam, Eve and God functioned as a very effective small group. They routinely did life together as they walked and talked in the cool of the evening sharing the experiences of the day.

If we go back even farther than the Old Testament we discover the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit sharing a level of relationship that modeled everything that is best about small groups.

How might God want to use small groups in our day to accomplish His purposes?

Small groups are a great place to facilitate the process of disciple-making.

The main mission of the church is to help men and women become disciples

of Jesus. Most people today tend to have a limited view of small groups believing that the reason small groups exist is to help people get connected with one another. But that mindset falls far short of the goal of making disciples that are closely connected with the Lord.



Maybe one of the biggest problems with Sunday School today can be traced back to this very issue. If we believe that Sunday School and or small groups

exist for the purposes of fellowship along we will fail to disciple people to obedience. Is your class or small group viewed as a means to further develop individuals as devoted followers of Jesus Christ? Are men, women, boys or girls becoming more like Jesus because of what they are learning and experiencing in the group? Whether you call your gathering a class or a small group is not important to me. What is important is whether or not people are being conformed to the image of Jesus. Gathering just to gather is highly ineffective and inefficient.

Sunday School can be a great apprentice/multiplication system.

Your church's ability to successfully build small groups is totally connected to your ability and commitment to developing apprentice leaders and multiplying small groups.

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Christian
Education
Department

Volume 9, Issue 2
March, April, May

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If you still have the same teachers/small group leaders in place today that you had ten years ago and if you have not increased the number of classes available over a decade ago you are in serious trouble. To be able to do more ministry we have to engage more people. This has to happen on two fronts. First, we have to increase the number of people willing to be involved in the delivery of ministry. Second, we have to open up more opportunity for people to receive ministry.



Neither of these is likely to happen in the absence of an apprentice/multiplication system.

An apprentice is a leader in formation, who will one day

lead his/her own group. The essence of the Great Commission is about reproduction. The apprentice model naturally leads to multiplication. One of the major reasons our Sunday School has grown consistently over the past many years now is the birthing of new classes from existing classes. If you have not birthed a new group in the last couple of years you may be heading toward a stagnate situation.

Sunday School must be seen as a foundational ministry not just another add on program.

Small groups will neither flourish nor last as just another program. When small groups are perceived as just "one more thing" that vies for time and attention, they turn

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Twentysomethings-The Next Generation

by Pastor Jeni Sanders

My husband and I have a passion for our generation, the twentysomethings. We saw a need for the twentysomethings at our church. So, we joined with a few others that have the same passion to form a small group. Our small group meets every other Friday. We eat, socialize, and have our lesson time. Usually we hang out afterwards and play various games. It is important to allow relationship building time so that everyone in the group makes a connection. We have learned a lot by starting this small group for our generation.

Here are some things that we have learned from our generation:

1. Jeff Baxter said that, "The twentysomethings want to participate in a gathering experience. We have learned that our generation is looking for a community environment not a "church" environment. We have our small group in our house. This environment facilitates discussion. In our small group everyone has a role, some bring pop, some bring food and some bring other things we need. By bringing something to the group it makes them feel that they have a purpose and that they are participating in the group. Our generation does not want to be preached to and then go home. They need to participate, feel like they belong to something. Jeff Baxter also said, "Those who are not yet followers of Jesus want to become part of the community before they come to follow Jesus."
2. Our generation wants to share stories. In our small group we allow them the freedom to share their stories. It might be their faith stories, what they are learning about God, or they prayer requests. This is an impor-



tant part of our group. It is very important that everyone in the group feels comfortable with sharing their stories.

3. They want authenticity from their leaders. Our generation is tired of fake and hypocritical leaders. Our generation wants authentic leaders. They want someone that will write and share their own stories instead of copying someone else's.

The twentysomethings are serious about their faith in Jesus Christ and about the church. The church needs to open up and connect with those in this generation. We need to study, listen and engage in conversation with them.

Small Groups, An Integral Part of Church

by Cheryl Harrison

Small Groups are an integral part of a growing church. It is true that the “larger we get, the smaller we must become.”



This is because people tend to get lost in a larger congregation and statistics will show that unless people get connected with someone, they will not continue to attend

church and could be lost for eternity. This is where small groups come in and are extremely important.

Small groups are the connecting point for people. It is the place where people “do life together” in community. When

done properly, small groups become the place where real spiritual growth takes place and people share their lives in an authentic way.

Not only is it a place for people to connect to one another, but it is an ideal place for people to connect with God. Sharing life together and holding each other accountable before God will help to build one spiritually. It is place where people are grown up spiritually. It is the place for people to connect with God. Sharing life together and holding each other accountable before God will help to build one up spiritually. It is the way for the things they say they believe in to find expression in the living of their daily lives.

Small groups also provide people with opportunities to serve others. Many groups take on projects and do things that otherwise they may never experience. Every time we do service for others, we grow and God smiles! Small groups helps this to happen.

Small groups are all about relationships. Relationships with God and relationships with others. These relationships will make a difference for eternity. If you do not belong to a small group, you are encouraged to do so at once.

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into a point of competition for resources rather than a philosophical foundation of ministry.

Traditional Sunday School, if done correctly, can serve well as an effective small group system but the outcome being pursued has to be life change not just getting people together again this Sunday to do more of the same thing they have been doing for the past decade.

For Sunday School to be effective as a small group vehicle the pastor will have to support it.

The pastor must be the primary vision-caster and sup-

porter of small groups in the church. This means “pulpit time” is given to small group issues. The pastor must deeply believe in the value of small groups, commit financial support to small groups, and be personally involved to some degree.

The level of personal involvement will vary from pastor to pastor and church to church, but it must be obvious to everyone that he/she believes in making disciples through small groups and the Sunday School.

My hope and prayer is that these thoughts will help you build a healthy and growing church that is developing disciples through small groups/Sunday School as a foundational part of your ministry.

Dynamics for Your Small Group

by Karen B. Hughes

The following dynamics are the ones I have found necessary to have a successful small group:

- **TIME**—The best time frame for small groups is usually 90 minutes, if the small group is held during the week. That gives the group ample time for prayer, study and fellowship, which are the 3 components of a small group. There should be a set quitting time so those who have to, can get home and get their kids to bed, while others with a huge need, feel free to spend the time praying or meeting needs of others in the group.
- **Privacy**—Respect people’s privacy! Be sensitive to individuals who do not wish to say anything during the small group. In my experience, when a person is quiet for several sessions, they usually open up when they feel it is safe to share. When a person feels connected to the group, they are more comfortable opening up and sometimes that takes time.
- **People’s Importance**—There is never a wrong answer in small groups. Encourage open discussions and you will see growth and learning! Someone may not have

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Dynamics for Your Small Group, continued

the same understanding of God. That's ok, maybe you can learn something new!

Individual Needs -People are needy! Small groups have much more of an advantage than large churches. People come to God because they are seeking answers to their needs. If someone is having a stressful time, there is an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to use the group to help that one person.

People's Sensitivity-There are people who are outgoing and insensitive, and there are others who are quiet and very sensitive. People learn to become more sensitive in a small group setting and learn not to offend people.

The reason is when they are in a small group they are allowed to speak, and they stand a good chance of learning not be offensive. Still, a good small group facilitator will limit the outgoing ones by asking for other opinions and by politely defending the sensitivities of the shy.



It's important to preserve flexibility, have faith in the Holy Spirit, and to respect each person as a holy priest used by God to minister to you and the others.

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Useless Life

A farmer got so old that he couldn't work the fields anymore. So he would spend the day just sitting on the porch. His son, still working the farm, would look up from time to time and see his father sitting there. "He's of no use any more," the son thought to himself, "he doesn't do anything!" One day the son got so frustrated by this, that he built a wood coffin, dragged it over to the porch, and told his father to get in. Without saying anything, the father climbed inside. After closing the lid, the son dragged the coffin to the edge of the farm where there was a high cliff. As he approached the drop, he heard a light tapping on the lid from inside the coffin. He opened it up. Still lying there peacefully, the father look up at his son. "I know you are going to throw me over the cliff, but before you do, may I suggest something?" What is it?" replied the son. "Throw me over the cliff if you like," said the father, "but save this good wooden coffin. Your children might need to use it."